

LCQ7: Prevention of youth suicides

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Han-pan and a written reply by the Secretary for Education, Mr Kevin Yeung, in the Legislative Council today (January 9):

Question:

Earlier on, the Task Force on Prevention of Youth Suicides submitted a report (the Report) to the Chief Executive. The Report proposes 13 recommendations on enhancing the Government's strategies and services. The Report points out that "[e]xcessive homework and assessment ... have been seen as sources of pressure for students", and it therefore recommends that schools should make efforts to improve the quality of homework and enhance assessment literacy. On the other hand, the Education Bureau (EDB) issued to schools in 2000, and thereafter updated from time to time, guidelines on homework and tests. Nevertheless, some parents have relayed to me recently that the problem of excessive homework and assessment remains serious. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) (i) of the new measures put in place by the EDB to ensure that the recommendations made in the Report will be implemented, and (ii) whether the EDB will consider afresh introducing measures to make it mandatory for schools to reduce homework and the number of examinations; if the EDB will, of the details; if not, the reason for that;

(2) when the recommendation made in the Report that one school social worker be provided for each primary school will be fully implemented; and

(3) given that the authorities launched the Joyful@School Campaign in the 2016-2017 school year to assist schools in promoting mental health and reducing the stigma attached by students to the help-seeking behaviour, of (i) the respective numbers of applications for grants under the Campaign received and approved, and (ii) the total amount of grants approved, by the authorities so far; the details and effectiveness of the activities funded?

Reply:

President,

The Government attaches great importance to the developmental needs and mental health of young people, and has been providing support to young people with mental health needs (including those with suicidal risk) through cross-sector and multi-disciplinary collaboration among different bureaux and departments. The Education Bureau (EDB) has been encouraging schools to adopt the Whole School Approach, synchronising the school policies, culture and practices with involvement of all stakeholders (including school personnel, parents and students) to promote mental health and to identify as well as support students with mental health needs. School professionals, including guidance teachers, school social workers and educational psychologists,

provide support and counselling services for students with learning and adjustment difficulties (including those with mental health needs). The EDB has also been actively promoting diversified development programmes, continuously enhancing the school curriculum and promoting life education so as to facilitate students' learning and development.

In the earlier report submitted to the Chief Executive by the Task Force on Prevention of Youth Suicides, a number of recommendations were provided. Although the report pointed out that excessive homework and assessment had been seen as part of the sources of pressure on students, it also clearly stated: "If used appropriately, these are in fact useful and indispensable tools in school education. The EDB has called on schools to design homework that are stimulating can help students to consolidate and apply what they have learnt at school rather than giving out homework that has the effect of mechanical drilling only." This shows that we are concerned about pressure exerted on students, yet we should not focus excessively on the homework load, frequency of tests and examinations and assessment results, thereby neglecting the importance of quality homework and assessment in enhancing student learning. Thus, the focus of the report is on improving the quality of homework and enhancing assessment literacy of teachers.

Regarding the questions raised by the Hon Chan Han-pan, my reply is as follows:

(1) The purposes of homework are to enable students to consolidate their learning in class, stimulate thinking, enhance their understanding of lesson topics and construct knowledge. The amount of homework given should definitely not be excessive, nor should it be meaningless and mechanical copying/drilling. The EDB always emphasises that it is the quality rather than the quantity of homework that matters. We do not agree to simply equate homework with study pressure and thereby negate the positive educational functions of quality homework. This may mislead the public and students that affect the overall educational outcome in the long run. In fact, the education sector generally agrees that homework has positive educational functions in the learning and teaching process, and is conducive to revision and consolidation of learning.

Regarding assessment, it facilitates students' learning by collecting evidence of their learning process and outcomes as reference for reviewing the effectiveness of curriculum implementation and students' learning so as to help refine the curriculum and teaching strategy. Assessments are not equivalent to examinations; they can be short tests, project work or daily coursework that assess students' performance continuously. Schools should formulate appropriate assessment policies in the light of their contexts and students' needs. Besides, schools should explain to parents these arrangements in a timely manner.

To enhance the assessment literacy of school leaders and teachers so that they can design quality assessment tasks, make good use of assessment data and communicate with parents appropriately, we will continue to provide them with effective supports, for example, organising professional training

programmes for teachers and recommending good practices employed by schools; conducting school visits and inspections, etc. to gain an understanding of the school implementation of relevant policies and give feedback to schools; and reviewing and updating relevant circulars and curriculum documents in a timely manner. Besides, we will continue to maintain liaison with school sponsoring bodies and school councils on homework and assessment matters.

We are of the view that it is not appropriate to set any rigid indicators/guidelines on homework load and frequency of tests and examinations for schools on an across-the-board basis. Instead, schools and teachers should be allowed to assign homework and formulate school-based assessment policies professionally based on their school contexts and students' learning needs. As for individual students with learning difficulties, their schools/teachers should communicate with the parents, and adapt homework and assessment arrangements.

(2) Starting from the 2018/19 school year, the policy of "one school social worker for each school" has been implemented in public sector primary schools. The new measure is implemented on the basis of the Comprehensive Student Guidance Service under which more resources are provided for schools. The objective of the new measure is to further enhance the overall quality of guidance services by ensuring that every public sector primary school is served by at least one school-based registered graduate social worker with professional qualifications.

For schools currently not employing student guidance teachers, the EDB has provided a three-year transitional period for them to switch to the new funding mode under the policy of "one school social worker for each school" before the 2021/22 school year. In the 2018/19 school year, about half of the public sector primary schools have opted to change to the new funding mode and currently over 80 per cent of public sector primary schools employ registered social workers. In case schools need more time to handle personnel matters in respect of their serving student guidance personnel and cannot switch to the new funding mode after the three-year transitional period, they may discuss with the EDB separately.

The EDB will continue to review the mode of collaboration between student guidance and social work services, and explore together with the sector various feasible proposals, so as to enable schools to adopt the best way to provide social work and guidance services for students.

(3) The EDB and Department of Health has jointly launched the Joyful@School Campaign to promote students' engagement in promoting mental well-being, cultivate positive culture and attitudes towards acceptance of help-seeking, raise students' knowledge and understanding of mental health through the three key elements of "Sharing", "Positive Thinking" and "Enjoyment of Life", so as to strengthen their ability to cope with challenging situations. One of the initiatives facilitating the implementation of the Joyful@School Campaign is the provision of additional resources by the Quality Education Fund (QEF) for proposals from schools, non-governmental organisations and tertiary education institutions through simplified procedures for mini-scale

applications for organising activities related to the Joyful@School Campaign, including a series of activities to enhance students' awareness and understanding of mental health as well as strengthening their ability to cope with adversity. The proposals would also provide teacher development programmes to empower teachers with the related skills for identifying and supporting students with lower level of resilience. From September 2016 to November 2018, the QEF received more than 900 related applications among which about 740 applications were approved with a total amount of funding of over \$140 million. Schools use different methods, including pre- and post-tests, focus group interviews and questionnaires to evaluate the effectiveness of the projects. The EDB also arranges visits to schools, observation of activities, and interviews with students, and conducts seminars for schools to share good practices, etc. to examine the progress of the projects. Overall speaking, schools find that the importance of mental health is promoted and students', as well as teachers', understanding of mental health is also enhanced through the project activities.

LCQ2: Operation and management of Kai Tak Cruise Terminal

Following is a question by the Hon Chung Kwok-pan and a reply by the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, in the Legislative Council today (January 9):

Question:

The Kai Tak Cruise Terminal (the Terminal), built at a cost of over \$8.2 billion by the Government, has been in operation for over five years since its commissioning in 2013. It has been reported that as the Terminal received no cruise ship calls for about two thirds of the days of last year, coupled with the facts that the public transport plying the Terminal is inconvenient and the Terminal lacks facilities to attract visits by tourists and members of the public, the Terminal has often been left deserted like a ghost town. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

1. of the number of ship calls at the Terminal, the cruise passenger throughput and its percentage in the total number of visitors to Hong Kong, their per capita spending in Hong Kong, the daily average visitor flow of the Terminal, as well as the percentage of the commercial floor areas leased out and the rental income therefrom, in each of the past five years;
2. whether it urged the terminal operator last year to conduct more promotional activities to boost the visitor flow of the Terminal; of the criteria adopted for assessing the performance of the operator, and the

circumstances under which the authorities will remove and replace the operator; and

3. whether it will review afresh the modes of operation and management of the Terminal and hold more events and activities (such as conventions and exhibitions) at the Terminal, so as to boost its visitor flow?

Reply:

President and fellow members

Thanks to the Hon Chung Kwok-pan's question.

The Government has all along been committed to developing Hong Kong into a cruise hub in the region. Developing cruise tourism not only enriches our tourism portfolios in attracting a different mix of visitors, but its related economic activities also bring benefits to tourism, hotel, retail, transport as well as food and beverage industries in Hong Kong. In 2018, the Government formulated a set of comprehensive strategies and directions for cruise tourism development so as to drive the balanced, healthy and sustainable development of cruise tourism in Hong Kong.

Since its commissioning in mid-2013, the Kai Tak Cruise Terminal (KTCT) has been an important infrastructure in promoting cruise tourism in Hong Kong. Currently, KTCT has ship calls on almost half of the days each year. The overall utilisation of KTCT by cruises has exceeded the then projected performance. Therefore, it is not factual to say that KTCT is vacant for most of the time. With the continuous efforts of relevant Government departments, the transport connectivity of KTCT has greatly improved compared with the early days of its commissioning. At present, apart from daily services provided by franchised buses, green minibus and ferry operator, the terminal operator and some cruise lines would also arrange additional shuttle buses and feeder ferry services to ease cruise passengers' flow. At the same time, the Government is carrying out various projects to improve transport infrastructure in the vicinity, so as to make KTCT more accessible.

My reply to the three parts of the Hon Chung's question is as follows:

(1) The number of ship calls at KTCT went up from 28 in 2014 (its first full year of commissioning) to 186 in 2017, while passenger throughput increased from 130 608 in 2014 to 784 073 in 2017. Both recorded a surge of over 500 per cent. At present, KTCT has accounted for over 80 per cent of the number of ship calls and cruise passenger throughput in Hong Kong as a whole.

Back in the earlier years when the Government was considering the construction of KTCT, it was projected that the number of ship calls and cruise passenger throughput in Hong Kong as a whole would range from 181 to 258 and from 564 102 to 1 041 031 respectively by 2023. With the joint efforts of the Government and the trade, the number of ship calls and cruise passenger throughput at KTCT in 2017 have both achieved the then projected performance by 2023.

As for the leasing condition at KTCT, all seven shops in the ancillary commercial area with a total area of about 5 600 square metres were leased. The rent of the shops is commercially agreed between the terminal operator and individual shop owners and it is not appropriate for the Government to disclose such information. It is worth noting that in addition to the fixed rent, the terminal operator is also required to pay a variable rent at a designated percentage based on rentals and other income.

The KTCT is an infrastructure dedicated for cruise berthing and cruise passengers embarking/disembarking. As cruise passengers include local residents, it is inappropriate to make direct comparison between the cruise passenger throughput and the total number of visitors to Hong Kong. The Government also has no record of the daily average passenger flow of the KTCT.

Other detailed figures in relation to the cruise tourism industry in Hong Kong and KTCT in the past five years are summarised at Annex.

(2) & (3) KTCT is a purpose-built infrastructure for berthing of cruise ships and handling large number of cruise passengers in immigration and customs control. The ancillary commercial area is also mainly for supporting cruise operation.

Currently, the cruise operation and ancillary commercial area of KTCT are operated on commercial principles by a terminal operator through open tender. The terminal operator is required to comply with various requirements as set out in the tenancy agreement, e.g. promote cruise tourism, ensure smooth operation of the terminal, engage regularly with the trade and report regularly to the relevant terminal management committee, comprising representatives from the Tourism Commission and relevant Government departments. The Government has been overseeing the performance of the terminal operator through various means such as meetings and site inspections, and has, from time to time, requested the terminal operator to make improvements in various aspects so as to ensure an orderly and effective operation at KTCT.

Despite the positioning of KTCT is to receive cruise ships and handle passengers, the Government, in order to better utilise the existing facilities, has been working closely with the terminal operator and other parties concerned to attract more people flow and add vibrancy to KTCT.

Without affecting cruise service, the terminal operator would lease out KTCT to hold various large scale private or public events, e.g. sport activities, product launches, media functions, carnivals, exhibitions, etc. In the past five years, there were about 230 days (including the time for set up, removal and reinstatement) with various events held at KTCT, attracting from hundreds to over fifty thousand participants. In the last year alone, KTCT was leased to hold a total of 10 non-cruise events. The terminal operator will continue to liaise closely with event organisers, and actively put in resources to participate in trade fairs, including overseas

large scale trade exhibition, so as to promote KTCT as an event venue and widen its usage.

Looking ahead, the Government would continue to strengthen the transport connectivity in the vicinity of KTCT and support different organisations to make use of KTCT for holding events. As various developments adjacent to KTCT, including hotels, office buildings, Kai Tak Sports Park, etc. will be completed progressively in the coming years, KTCT and the adjacent area will form a commercial and entertainment cluster, the synergy of which will greatly uplift the people flow and vibrancy there.

Thank you, President.

Effective Exchange Rate Index

The effective exchange rate index for the Hong Kong dollar on Wednesday, January 9, 2018 is 104.2 (down 0.1 against yesterday's index).

LCQ4: Manpower of doctors

Following is a question by the Hon Tommy Cheung and a reply by the Acting Secretary for Food and Health, Dr Chui Tak-yi, in the Legislative Council today (January 9):

Question:

It has been reported that with the successive commissioning of cross-boundary infrastructure facilities, an "one-hour living circle" has basically been realised in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. As a result, more and more Mainlanders come to Hong Kong to seek medical treatment. Quite a number of doctors in public hospitals have switched to work in the thriving private healthcare market, thereby aggravating the problem of shortage of doctors in public hospitals. Consequently, the waiting time of new cases at various public specialist outpatient clinics has become longer and longer in recent years. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) whether it knows the top 10 specialist departments in public hospitals with the highest wastage rates of doctors last year; and the respective wastage rates concerned;

(2) whether it has projected afresh the respective manpower demands for doctors in the public and the private healthcare sectors in the coming five

years, having regard to the factors that more and more doctors have joined the private healthcare sector and that the number of Mainlanders coming to Hong Kong to seek medical treatment has continued to increase; if so, of the respective specific figures; if not, whether it will expeditiously make such projections; and

(3) of the long-term solutions to the problem of shortage of doctors in public hospitals; whether it will draw reference from the practice of Singapore and permit those doctors who graduated from medical schools of renowned universities outside the territory to practise in the territory without sitting for any examination, and whether it will provide incentives to encourage Hong Kong people who have completed medical training overseas to return to Hong Kong to work in public hospitals; if so, of the details (including the implementation timetables for the relevant measures); if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

My reply to the question raised by the Hon Tommy Cheung is as follows:

(1) In 2017/18, the overall attrition rate of full-time doctors in public hospitals was 5.8 per cent. The top 10 specialties in public hospitals with the highest attrition rates of full-time doctors were Anaesthesia, Clinical Oncology, Family Medicine, Medicine, Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Ophthalmology, Orthopaedics and Traumatology, Pathology, Psychiatry and Radiology. The respective attrition rates of the above specialities ranged from 5 per cent to 10.6 per cent. Details are set out at Annex 1.

(2) The Government published the Report of Strategic Review on Healthcare Manpower Planning and Professional Development (Report) in mid-2017. For doctors' manpower, the projections have taken into account demographic changes and other relevant factors, including the known and planned services and developments, the requirements of public and private healthcare, social welfare and education sectors, as well as the demand for primary, secondary and tertiary care services in Hong Kong. It is projected that there will be continuous manpower shortage of doctors in the medium to long term. The manpower gaps for doctors in 2020, 2025 and 2030 are set out at Annex 2.

As an ongoing initiative to monitor the manpower of healthcare professionals, the Government will conduct manpower planning and projections for healthcare professionals once every three years in step with the triennial planning cycle of the University Grants Committee (UGC). A new round of manpower projection exercise has already commenced, and the results are expected to be published in the first half of 2020. In conducting healthcare manpower planning, the Food and Health Bureau (FHB) will, in collaboration with relevant policy bureaux and departments, assess the manpower situations of various healthcare professionals by taking into account all the known and planned services/developments as far as possible, such as the latest development of public and private hospitals, the

development of the Greater Bay Area and its implications, etc.

(3) I will elaborate on the following measures which have been taken to increase doctors' manpower:

(i) The Government has substantially increased UGC-funded medical training places over the past decade. The number of places was 470 in the 2016/17 academic year, representing an increase of 90 per cent when compared with 250 in the 2005/06 academic year. In the 2019/20 to 2021/22 UGC triennium, the Government will further increase the number of UGC-funded medical training places by 60 each year. We expect that increasing the number of medical training places will alleviate the manpower shortage of doctors in the medium to long term.

Healthcare professionals in the public sector are of utmost importance. The Hospital Authority (HA) will recruit all qualified locally trained medical graduates and provide them with relevant specialist training. There will be a total of over 2 000 medical graduates becoming registered doctors in the coming five years. Moreover, the HA will continue to proactively recruit doctors, retain existing healthcare professionals and rehire retired doctors to address the manpower shortage of doctors in the public healthcare system.

(ii) Upon commencement of the Medical Registration (Amendment) Ordinance 2018, the validity period and renewal period of limited registration have been extended from not exceeding one year to not exceeding three years. It is expected that more eligible non-locally trained doctors, particularly those who are Hong Kong people, will be attracted to serve in the public sector in Hong Kong through limited registration, thus alleviating the manpower shortage problem. The HA and the Department of Health (DH) will continue to proactively recruit eligible non-locally trained doctors through the limited registration arrangement to provide clinical services in the public healthcare system. So far, about 20 applications for positions under limited registration submitted by non-locally trained doctors to the HA have preliminarily been assessed as eligible. Successful applicants will start providing services in 2019/20 gradually.

To further encourage Hong Kong students studying medicine overseas to return to Hong Kong to practise, the FHB, HA and DH have collaborated with overseas Economic and Trade Offices in conducting promotion activities to encourage qualified non-locally trained doctors to practise in Hong Kong. The Secretary for Food and Health (SFH) went to the United Kingdom (UK) in May last year to meet with Hong Kong students studying medicine there and encourage them to return to Hong Kong to practise after graduation. Their responses were positive. A seminar was held in Hong Kong in August last year by Hong Kong students studying medicine in the UK, at which the SFH and representatives from the HA and DH were invited to speak on the opportunities for overseas medical students to practise in Hong Kong. The Chief Secretary for Administration and HA Chairman visited the UK in September last year to promote the HA's recruitment scheme. The SFH has also planned to visit Australia in the middle of this year to promote the scheme.

(iii) To facilitate more non-locally trained medical graduates to practise in Hong Kong after passing the Licensing Examination (LE), the Medical Council of Hong Kong (MCHK) has, on the premise of upholding professional standards, enhanced the arrangements for the LE, including increasing the frequency of the LE to twice a year, and introducing more flexible arrangements for relevant internship requirement since 2016. In addition, the MCHK officially launched the Virtual Education Resource Centre in October 2018 to improve the transparency of the LE and refine the examination questions.

(iv) For non-locally trained doctors who have passed the LE and worked in the HA for three years under limited registration, the MCHK is exploring if their internship requirement could be exempted. This is to provide more incentive for eligible non-locally trained doctors to serve in the public healthcare system in Hong Kong through limited registration.

The Government will continue to take forward the recommendations of the Report with a view to planning ahead for the long-term manpower demand. It will also take into account the effectiveness of extending the period of limited registration and responses from the healthcare sector before deciding on the way forward.

Postal services to Antigua and Barbuda temporarily suspended

Hongkong Post announced today (January 9) that, as advised by the postal administration of Antigua and Barbuda, mail operations in Antigua and Barbuda have been affected by strike action of the postal workers. Mail acceptance has ceased. Hongkong Post has suspended all postal services (except Speedpost) to Antigua and Barbuda with immediate effect until further notice.